Leadership of 'messy, tense International Schools': The potential scope for a fresh, positive lens of inquiry

Introduction

The continuous growth story

The diverse arena of 'International Schooling' is continuously growing yet still under-reported. What began as 'a well-kept secret' (Hayden and Thompson, 2008 p.15) encompassing 372 schools worldwide educating approximately 80,000 children (Leach, 1969, p.162) has grown enormously in scale and importance. Based upon substantial market intelligence, the 'K-12 English-medium international school market' in 2017 involved 9,200 schools teaching 5 million children and employed 463,000 staff (Lee and Walker, 2018 p.465).

Recent reports identify over 10,000 schools, employing 500,000 staff (Speck, 2019a). Much of the staff are British; it is reported (Ferguson, 2018) that about 15,000 educators 'flee' British schools to teach abroad in the growing field. Other reports (Speck, 2019b) identify the field involving one million educators by 2029. China in 2019 has the most schools, and Dubai contains the most students (Civinini, 2019). It is expected that by 2026 the field will involve 16,000 schools teaching 8.75 million students (Gaskell, 2016).

Simply put, we should expect substantial and unprecedented growth in the field in terms of schools, students, staff, and fee income over the next decade (Bunnell, 2019). One sub-body of this arena, the well-established American-ethos schools overseas, was recently discussed in this journal *(*Mahfouz, Sausner, and Kornhaber, 2019). However, this is a relatively small area of the field since most contemporary schools offer a British-based curriculum, and are increasingly located in Asia/Middle East (Machin, 2017). Further, most are now operating 'for-

profit' and aiming at a 'local' market, which is completely different from the previous landscape of activity (Bunnell, 2014; 2019).

The emergent 'Growth Paradox'

Within this changing and continuous growth paradigm, commentators are slowly beginning to realise that the 'International School' offers much scope for inquiry. Almost two decades ago, Yamato (2003 p.87) had concluded that it was 'a fascinating domain for comparative analysis of education' and it is now accepted that they are 'a phenomenon worthy of academic research' (Tarc and Mishra Tarc, 2015 p.34). One over-looked 'fascinating phenomena' is the *continuous* growth, since a major paradox appears in the literature; the field of 'International Schooling' is usually presented as messy, tense, problematic and challenging yet it continues in practice to attract and retain a growing body of educators.

The tensions are growing. Leaders in 'International Schools' are now placed under greater technological scrutiny, with 'mistakes' and decisions quickly aired on social media sites such as the well-established *ISR.com* (see Bunnell, 2018). The fact that leaders (both Directors, and middle-management Principals) in 'International Schools' work under the constant fear of being 'outed' by anonymised critics who either still reside or have left the school, creates a particularly messy and tense environment. However, the leaders seem to cope, and 'survive'. How can we begin to make sense of this?

I present this as the 'International Schooling Growth Paradox'. The growing field comes across in literature, especially quite recently, as a largely unappealing and unattractive area of education involving much precarity and insecurity (e.g. Bailey, 2015; Halicioglu, 2015; Bunnell, 2016; Blyth, 2017; Savva, 2017; Poole, 2019a and b). Yet, it seemingly continuously retains and recruits new players and actors. How does it keep attracting staff (teachers, and

leaders)? How do they cope? What strategies do they adopt to 'survive'? A phenomenon here needs investigating.

These original questions form the essence of my commentary which argues we need a very fresh lens of inquiry as the current (and past) debate is not adequate, and does fully address the situation whereby a field of education that is theoretically unattractive continues in practice to both retain and attract its key actors and players. This is especially true in a school leadership context, where the literature (sparse, yet well-established) paints a picture that is extremely unappealing and unconducive for long-term growth.

As said by Keller (2015 p.990): 'The leadership context for these schools is often filled with ambiguity and complex tensions between opposing forces.' The notion of 'tensions', alongside a conception that the role involves dealing with 'opposing forces' is ever-present in the literature, as my commentary will reveal. Added to the harsh and unpredictable precarity and insecurity of constant social media attention, this all paints a very bleak picture. In this context, my commentary picks up on the comment made earlier in this journal that 'International Schools', in terms of research in leadership, exist as 'an increasingly influential but under-researched domain of education' (Lee, Hallinger and Walker, 2010 p.666).

My commentary offers the view that a fresh approach is needed. I argue that the continuously growing field of 'International Schooling' should not be viewed solely within a negative lens that identifies the problems, challenges, and obstacles since that alone does not reflect the reality of existence and does not explain why the actor and layers continue to stay in the field. Starting with the leadership of 'International Schools', I believe that this area of schooling requires a wholly new approach, which helps instead explain why it continues to grow and both retain and attract more educators, rather than stagnate and decline under

pressures of conflict and micro-politics. The actor and players who enter the field seem to 'cope', perhaps even flourish, and this requires some thought, and theorisation.

I will next present the 'negative' picture further in my commentary, both using a review of the historical literature and an analysis of the content of contemporary literature. I will then discuss a different approach, using the lens of the fledgling area of 'Positive Sociology'. My commentary will then finish with a discussion about taking the topic forward.

The literature on leadership in 'International Schools'

The general paucity of discussion in literature

It is important to realise that the leadership in 'International Schools' is a very under-reported and under-theorised area of education in spite of the accepted tribulations. Even relatively recently, it was being asserted (Hayden and Thompson, 2013 p.4) that most people are 'completely unaware of their existence.' In particular, the area of leadership of these schools have been neglected by research investigation, and general discussion. Put succinctly, it can be agreed upon that 'research literature on leadership in International Schools is thin on the ground' (Lee and Walker, 2018 p.465).

This is a well-established problem. On the opening page of the only book that has been published specifically dealing with the leadership and management of 'International Schools', the editors Blandford and Shaw (2001 p.9) had argued that:

> 'The effective running of schools has been subject to scrutiny in recent years, but there is a paucity of documentary evidence concerning leadership in *international* schools'.

One can see that this comment is almost two-decades old and the field has grown in size, four-fold since then. Yet, the comment still rings surprisingly true, as seen in Lee and Walker's

(2018) comment described above. Walker and Cheng (2009 p.43), a decade ago, also noted the lack of research attention. They said that:

> 'Although research has increasingly focused on school leadership, in general it has been conspicuous by its absence in the international schools arena.'

In particular, in spite of the enormous growth across Asia, it has been pointed out in this journal (Lee, Hallinger and Walker, 2012 p.292) that 'empirical research exploring leadership in international schools in Asia-Pacific is rarely found'. Put simply, leadership in 'International Schools' (globally) is a neglected area of concern. My commentary will now investigate the literature, as it exists.

The historical discourse about leadership

It is normal to view the body of 'International Schools' as having a key feature characterised by high rates of turn-over of all stakeholders. Indeed, it is even accepted that this is a particular feature of this type of school. Walker (2002 p.213) had commented that:

> '…national schools have a certain advantage over their international counterparts because they do not suffer from the debilitating turnover of staff, students, and parents that characterize international schools…'

The word 'debilitating' is crucial, implying that leaders in 'International Schools' have a problem merely to cope. Blandford and Shaw (2001 pp.14-15) drew up a list of nine criteria which they identified as making leadership in an 'International School' different, and more complex, than in other types of school. High turnover of stakeholders was one issue mentioned, alongside the precarious position of the heads of schools. It was asserted (Blandford and Shaw, 2001 p.14) that:

> ‘There is less security of tenure for a headteacher in an international school than in most national schools: being fired is a frequent occurrence.’

The high turnover and precarity of school leaders in ‘International Schools’ is a long-standing issue of discussion. This is important point to consider, since it pre-dates the enormous changes within the operational paradigm that have occurred in recent years (e.g. the commercialisation of the field, shift towards for-profit etc.). Over 50 years ago, Mayer (1968 p.130) had commented on how one school in Northern Europe he had visited, had five different Directors between 1959 and 1966. At the same time, Mayer (1968 p.155) in his visits to fledgling ‘International Schools’ had extorted the ‘fearful lack of continuity in the leadership of most of these schools’. There was reference to highly-charged organizations involving ‘explosive confrontations’ (Mayer, 1968 p.78) between stakeholders. It was commented how many schools ‘have sprung up independently and each is a law unto itself’ (Mayer, 1968 p.155). Echoing that comment, Blandford and Shaw (2001 p.9) had said how:

> ‘Unlike national schools, however, international schools are often ‘islands’ with minimal reference to authorities beyond the local community.’

Direct discussion on the topic has asserted (Littleford (1999 p.33) how: ‘too many International Schools today are revolving doors for heads.’ However, obtaining data on turnover has proven difficult. Odland and Ruzicka (2009 p.6) had concluded that the:

> ‘independent quality of International Schools means that collecting comprehensive and accurate data on issues such as teacher turn-over has proven very difficult.’

Hence, very limited surveys have been undergone into school leader turnover in ‘International Schools’, but they have nevertheless revealed the extent of the issue. At least two have even attempted to give a longevity timeline. Hawley’s (1994; and 1995) seminal study the longevity of 196 leaders (Directors) in ‘International Schools’ revealed an average tenure of 2.8 years.

However, 15% in Hawley's study had left after just one year and fewer than seven percent had done more than seven years in a school. Benson's (2011) study into 83 schools revealed that the average term of office had seemingly risen, and now stood at 3.7 years.

Interestingly, Benson (2011 p.93) had concluded that this greater longevity was possibly due to 'improvements in technology', implying that school leaders now have access to a greater array of information about conditions in schools i.e. they are better informed and able to make more suitable judgements about which school they might choose to work in. The flipside to this aspect is that anonymous social media comment can be brutally harsh on leaders, causing teachers and schools to be wary of their entry (Bunnell, 2018). Here we have another aspect of the 'Growth Paradox' that I highlighted earlier.

There has always existed a consensus view that this high turnover of school leaders is due to micro-political tensions, leading to leaders being 'shown the revolving door'. Littleford (1999 p.23) had also commented that: 'Almost eighty percent of all heads of school are fired. They do not leave of their own volition.' Stout (2005) had backed this startling assertion. The numerous studies into micro-politics (Caffyn, 2008; 2010; 2015; 2018) in 'International Schools' have identified 'issues of identity, fear and vulnerability' (Caffyn, 2010 p.50). Indeed, the metaphor of 'Vampirism' has been substantially used by Caffyn (2015; 2019), implying that the school leader faces 'dark forces'.

Simply put, the historical discourse on leadership in 'International Schools', going back five decades has always been quite negative, focusing on the challenges and tribulations of leadership in these schools.

An analysis of the contemporary discussion

My commentary will now explore the contemporary academic discussion regarding leadership in 'International Schools'. An analysis of 14 Abstracts taken from academic journal articles

using ‘International Schools’ and ‘Leaders/Leadership’ in the title, published since 2011, helps reveal the contemporary trends and developments in terms of discussions. This brings the discussion up-to-date following Benson’s (2011) seminal study mentioned above. Given the paucity of such literature, as already noted, this (i.e. Abstracts from 14 academic journal papers) constitutes a sizeable body of available data. I deliberately omitted the nine papers on the topic that appeared in one edition of *Peabody Journal of Education* in 2018, to be mentioned later, as this would have substantially skewered the analysis.

Several key themes emerged. The biggest discussion involved qualitative studies revolved around ‘leadership style’, with ‘Instructional’ being the most discussed, followed by ‘Distributed’ and ‘Transformational’. Most discussion concerns ‘Traditional International Schools’ i.e. those offering one or more of the programmes of the Geneva-registered ‘International Baccalaureate’. It should be noted, however, that this body of schools now constitutes only a small minority of all ‘International Schools’, within a ‘premium-sector’ paradigm of activity. The geography of the emergent discussions comes clearly through the prevalence of ‘Asia’ and the term ‘East’. In short, this analysis reveals that the newer body of schools (for-profit, non-premium, non-international curricula, and catering for locals) seemingly still evade academic research attention. One can identify here enormous gaps in the literature.

The concept of ‘complexity of job’ comes through the prevalent mentioning of ‘dualities’, ‘complexity’, and ‘tensions’. The story that emerges here is that leadership in ‘International Schools’ involves the school leader having to deal with both the internal body (teachers, children) and the external (owners, parents, government agencies), which creates a complex set of tensions as the needs of the two bodies can conflict with each other and requires a degree of priority-giving. One Abstract had discussed this when saying that:

> ‘In particular, the International School with its vulnerabilities and issues of identity is prone to boundary attacks both from within and from the outside.’

Another Abstract, involving a review of the literature, concluded that ‘International Schools’ face considerable change and transition. It is said that:

> ‘The review finds that international schools experience considerable unhelpful change and transition, where consistency is highly prized yet difficult to achieve. Along with tensions between their equitable and market orientation, transition emerges as the most significant challenge facing educational leaders in this context.’

Subsequently, it is often stated that this type of school is especially ‘complex’, with a potential for conflict between stakeholders. One Abstract said that:

> ‘The high degree of cultural diversity in these schools augments the complexity of leadership because staff, students, and parents bring their own cultural heritage, experience, and expectations to bear, together, in a single school setting.’

In particular, the growing shift within the field away from parent co-operatives, owned by the school community, towards schools being operated ‘for-profit’, often within commercially-run networks adds to the complexity. Another Abstract said that:

> ‘The language of client, customer and consumer may not yet be embedded in the classroom, but international school leaders, particularly those operating in for-profit contexts, are having to respond not only to the needs of educational stakeholders but also to the commercial demands of the ‘bottom line’.’

This issue creates another ‘duality’, with leaders balancing the academic needs of the internal community with the commercial needs of the external. Another Abstract discussed this issue, saying that:

> ‘Leaders of International Schools find themselves operating within a loosely defined, yet rapidly growing, specialty niche of education. The leadership context for these schools is often filled with ambiguity and complex tensions between opposing forces.’

The need for a fresh lens of inquiry will be presented next, alongside a practical suggestion for introducing an alternative approach.

The scope for a fresh, positive lens of inquiry

The recent call for a new lens of inquiry

The body of literature has very recently moved on slightly, but continues to paint a very unappealing picture. A systematic review of the literature on leadership in ‘International Schools’ by another author had summarizing that leaders faced ‘considerable unhelpful change and transition’ (Gardner-McTaggart, 2018 p.158).

A call (Lee, Hallinger, and Walker, 2012) for more descriptive and analytical studies of leadership in diverse cultural and geographical settings, led in 2018 to a Special Issue of the *Peabody Journal of Education* (Volume 93, Number 5) which I mentioned earlier, and which resulted in seven original articles accompanied by two commentaries. Given the paucity of literature, this constituted a major contribution to the field of study. Issues such as ‘vampirism’ (Caffyn, 2018), and ‘precarity’ (Bunnell, 2018) appeared (yet again). It was commented (Lee and Walker, 2018 p.466) that the articles overall revealed:

> ‘organisational dynamics such as micropolitics, group conflict, rivalry and division, negative leadership traits such as trauma, boundaries, and organisational vulnerability…’

When summarising this body of work, Craven (2018 p.584) subsequently identifies 'International Schools' as a 'fertile yet under-cultivated' context for studies into leadership. Moreover, Craven (2018 p.586) identified a complex range of challenges, described as:

> 'the tribulations faced by school leaders – diverse but high expectations, high personnel mobility, heightened political sensibility, competing priorities, conflicting value propositions, and multicultural complexity.'

Moving forward, Craven (2018 p.586) saw 'an ostensibly outlier nature of International Schools', which presents this body of schools as offering extreme examples of the trials faced by school leaders more generally. In other words, it was felt that the growing body of 'International Schools' should be viewed as potential laboratories for further research and investigation into challenges and issues that most school leaders face, except the nature of 'International Schools' makes the situations more extreme and offers opportunities for a wider range of discussions. Such an approach offers an exciting new research base for the field of 'International Schooling', and potentially invites a wider audience of researchers to get involved using the growing field as a test-bed for ideas and sociological tools which might aid our understanding of leadership in wider schooling contexts. Craven concluded (2018 p.586) that:

> 'The messy, fluid, and unpredictable nature of International School contexts might just be the perfect testing ground conducive to deconstructing conventional conceptions and reconstructing them…'

My commentary offers a starting point for this 'deconstructing' of 'conventional conceptions'. After all, the reports are always about educators 'fleeing' abroad (e.g. Ferguson, 2018, referring to teachers leaving England), and never refer to an influx of dissatisfied and disaffected educators returning home. There must be something positive that allows them to 'balance-out'

the negatives. This seemingly 'one-way traffic' requires thoughtful sociological analysis and discussion, especially since the reporters who have been in the field constantly reveal it is not as appealing as people think, involving numerous myths, pitfalls and misconceptions (e.g. Loxton, 2016; Roberts, 2016).

Resnik (2012, p.291) had asserted the field is 'an emerging and promising field of sociological enquiry', and I offer the relatively 'new' and largely under-discovered field of 'positive sociology' as a promising tool of inquiry to focus attention more on how leaders survive and flourish in spite of the messy, challenging work-context. In short, how do we explain the continuous growth of 'International Schooling' within an operational paradigm that identifies it as a problematic and unattractive area of school leadership? How can we make sense of the every-day reality of being a leader in an institution as messy and tense as an 'International School'? I will next discuss the 'new' concept of 'Positive Sociology'.

The concept of 'Positive Sociology': A potential new lens

The focus on the 'negative' in sociological inquiry and imagination is well accepted and its on-going dominance in literature on leadership in 'International Schools' is entirely understandable. One writer (Heckert, 2007 p.1) suggests that:

> 'The substantive area of deviance has focused on the negative and consequently positive deviance is an important and not yet fully tapped concept.'

In other words, it is understandable, almost acceptable, for literature to focus on why leaders might leave a school rather than discuss and investigate how they might find strategies to survive. Negative deviance from the norm attracts most sociological attention, with issues such as conflict (crime, violence etc.) and misery (poverty, suicide etc.) being the primary focus of attention and investigation. Frawley (2017) even identifies a broader 'happiness problem', with

wider discussion, for example among news media, being pre-occupied with negative issues in life.

The alternative 'positive' (note: linked to 'positivity' not 'positivist') approach has been termed 'humanistic sociology' (Goodwin, 1983). The associated concept of 'Positive Sociology' is often ascribed to the American-Canadian sociologist Robert A. Stebbins and his 2009 book *Personal Decisions in the Public Square,* where he argues strongly that the mainstream sociological discussion is usually 'problem-centred' and there is a need to move away from viewing sociology about merely dealing with negative issues in life. The nearest to a definition of 'Positive Sociology' comes from Stebbins (2009a, in Preface, p.xi) when he says his presented 'new scholarly field' is concerned with looking:

> 'into how, why, and when people pursue those things in life that they desire, the things they do to make their existence attractive and worth living'.

He further states that:

> 'Positive Sociology is the study of what people do to organize their lives such that those lives become, in combination, rewarding, satisfying, and fulfilling.'

In this context, 'Positive Sociology' is a study of how people cope and survive in the face of adversity. In reality, people adopt strategies and ways of dealing with negative issues. The two are arguable equally of importance to study.

Discussion

The emphasis on 'Negative Sociology'

The overall picture that emerges from my analysis is that discussion about leadership in 'International Schools' has always, since the 1960s, had a tendency to focus upon 'dark' or

'negative' aspects. My intention is not to say these issues need neglecting, or are given too much attention, but to point out they have a flip-side based upon how people cope. These issues are often viewed as challenges, whilst the schools face a constantly changing landscape. In particular, a common theme, which is getting stronger, is that leadership of such schools involves a complex 'balancing act', with a strong possibility that one or more key agent might feel neglected or side-lined. This situation raises considerable questions about the strategies people adopt to cope and 'survive'.

This becomes important when we consider that the 'messy, tense' aspect of leadership is seemingly worsening. The advent of 'International Schools' now having many 'locals', plus having 'funders' and 'investors' adds considerably to the complexity. This creates a complex set of boundaries for a school leader to manage with a possibility that one or more of the boundaries could be 'crossed', leading to tensions and personal conflict. One end-result of this activity is the situation described where leaders are 'named and shamed' on social media websites by disgruntled teachers who sense the lack of a 'safety valve' to release the pressure (see Bunnell, 2018).

An alternative lens is required. Even the terminology used within the common discourse is 'negative'. Consider the constant discussion about 'turnover' in 'International Schools'. Why does the discussion not focus instead on 'mobility' or simply 'movement'? The high turnover of school leaders is seen as destructive, debilitating, and damaging. Why not, instead, regard it as evidence of 'flexibility' or 'freedom' of movement? Surely it is better than being *trapped* in a job. Mayer (1968) had talked about witnessing instability, confrontations, and factions. In this context, the discussion has always been largely a 'Negative Sociology' one, based on a framework revolving around dismissal, conflict, tensions, and micro-politics. In a sense, this is arguably a *norma*l sociology lens of analysis. It is time this was reconsidered, since it does not explain the phenomenal growth story that the field entails.

The emerging research agenda

In spite of all this negative reporting, the field of 'International Schooling' continues to grow. As I have asserted, there is emerging a major 'Growth Paradox', especially at a leadership level. Moreover, leaders in 'International Schools' seem amazingly resilient and this issue deserves attention.

There is particular scope for moving the academic discussion beyond simplistically discussing leaders' turnover, with a well-known longevity of 2-4 years (Hawley, 1994, and 1995; Benson, 2015), towards an inquiry into how many leaders' subsequently move elsewhere i.e. they move to another school. In other words, there is a need to move beyond merely focusing on *turnover*, and more towards *attrition*. In this instance, we would move closer to what Craven (2018) had called-for in 'deconstructing conventional conceptions.' After all, some leaders have been within the field for decades although they might have moved schools a lot. The turnover-rate may be high, but the attrition-rate could be low (this specific topic, of attrition, needs specific research attention as it has seemingly never been discussed).

This all points to a direct line of research inquiry: 'How do leaders of International Schools, in the long-run, cope?', and 'Why, and how, do they stay within the field?' A major agenda for further research begins to appear. For instance, 'What coping strategies do they adopt?' Here emerges enormous scope for offering within 'International Schooling' a 'Positive Sociology' (or broader 'humanistic sociology') line of inquiry. It does seem time that this happened, almost inevitable. The field has always largely lacked a 'sociological imagination' (Wright Mills, 1959), seeing life in reality beyond the notion that leadership is challenging and problematic. Yet, as Thin (2014 p.2) had concluded, 'it is inevitable that the other social

sciences must develop their own ways of paying 'positive' attention to the social facilitation of wellbeing.'

An immediate research inquiry could involve a 'Delphi Method Study', where long-standing current and former leaders' of 'International Schools' might form a panel of experts. Through a series of surveys, a picture could emerge of how these people coped and dealt with the challenges and tribulations. Thus, might begin an inquiry into what Glass (1971) termed 'a sociology of being'.

Such a study might take a 'serious leisure perspective' (Stebbins, 2009b) inquiring into the hobbies, pastimes and external interests of school leaders. How do they use leisure time to achieve happiness? At the same time, the way the school is structured by leaders might be of interest. Research into teacher resilience concluded (Gu and Day, 2013 p.22) that:

> 'Their capacity to be resilient fluctuated as a result of the influences of the personal, relational and organisational settings in which they worked.'

In other words, the way the school leader modifies and organizes their conditions of work is of interest. Do they employ people they know, to act as 'buddies'? Do they delegate unpleasant tasks to these 'buddies'? Such an approach might be deemed the 'organizational structure perspective'. Stebbins (2009a) had identified 'Positive Sociology' as inquiring into how individuals organize their *life* in order to seek 'happiness', yet it could equally be the case that school leaders also organize their *institution*.

Both perspectives, involving a study of 'external' and 'internal' processes and mechanisms would develop a rich picture of how school leaders cope. To reiterate another important point, they might leave a school yet they could also stay within the field, moving to another school. In this sense, they 'survive'.

We probably need quite a nuanced approach. Poole's (2019a p.60) research among teachers in two 'International Schools' in Shanghai, China, had concluded that we need to view 'a localised educational precariat rather than a global class in and of itself.' In other words, maybe we cannot generalise across nations, or regions. The reality of being a leader in an 'International School' in mainland China may differ much from that of, say, Dubai. The conditions of precarity are probably not geographically uniform.

Moreover, new and novel avenues of inquiry are beginning to appear. Poole's (2019b) research into three 'International School' teachers' experiences as part of an emergent 'Global Middle Class' in China had uncovered a significant 'new' tool being utilised by teachers, in the face of adversity of precarity. It was concluded that they are accumulating 'resilience capital' (Poole, 2019b p.1):

> 'Resilience capital is produced when teachers take a more positive attitude towards negative or precarious experiences, utilising them in order to develop skills, dispositions and endurance which also can be converted into more traditional economic and cultural forms of capital.'

Here lays an exciting new avenue of inquiry, taking the perspective that school leaders in 'International Schools' might accumulate a form of 'resilience capital' which, over time, might be advantageous and useful. It has been argued elsewhere (Maulding et al, 2012) that resilience in school leaders is a form of 'emotional intelligence'. This involves 'intelligently' viewing a 'setback' as an 'experience' or 'story', which adds to the individual's sense of character, perhaps even elevating their standing or reputation in certain circles. They become, of sorts, 'badges of honour'. One wonders, 'How, and when, do school leaders release this capital?'

Going back to Craven's (2018) comments, such research will be of wider interest to scholars. Taking a view that 'International Schools' act as rather extreme incubators of

insecurity and precarity, they offer a rich source of potential data into how school leaders cope and survive which might, in turn, be of use to the wider field of school leadership.

To summarize, my commentary has focused attention on the potential of the 'messy, tense' nature of leadership in 'International Schools' being viewed within a fresh lens of inquiry. Beyond the normal 'negative' lens, usual within sociology, there is enormous scope for a 'positive' lens, which scans the activities, processes, and strategies that school leaders utilize to cope in the face of adversity. By gradually moving towards building-up 'A Sociology of International Schooling', we can begin to make sense of the emerging tensions and paradoxes in this growing yet problematic field of education, and this might further be of use to a much wider audience.

References

Bailey, L. (2015) Reskilled and 'Running Ahead': Teachers in an 'International School' talk about their work, *Journal of Research in International Education* 14 (1), 3-15.

Bartram, D. (2012) Elements of a sociological contribution to happiness studies, *Sociology Compass* 6 (8), 644-656.

Benson, J. (2011) An investigation of chief administrator turnover in international schools, *Journal of Research in International Education* 10 (1), 87-103.

Blandford, S., & Shaw, M. (2001) The nature of 'International School' leadership, in: S. Blandford and M. Shaw (Eds.), *Managing International Schools* pp. 9-28. London: Routledge Falmer.

Blyth C (2017) *International Schools, Teaching and Governance: An Autoethnography of a Teacher in Conflict*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bunnell T (2014) *The Changing Landscape of International Schooling: Implications for Theory and Practice.* London: Routledge.

Bunnell T (2016) Teachers in 'International Schools': A global educational 'precariat'? *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 14 (4), 543-559.

Bunnell, T. (2018) Social media comment on leaders in 'International Schools': The causes of negative comments and the implications for leadership practices, *Peabody Journal of Education* 93 (5), 551-564.

Bunnell, T. (2019) *International Schooling and Education in the 'New Era': Emerging Issues*. Emerald Publishing Group: Bingley, England.

Caffyn, R. (2008) Understanding the historical context: history as an investigative lens in studying the micro-politics of 'International Schools', *International Schools Journal* 27 (2), 29-36.

Caffyn, R. (2010) 'We are in Transylvania, and Transylvania is not England': Location as a significant factor in 'International School- micro-politics, *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 38 (3), 321-340.

Caffyn, R. (2015) Fragmentation in international schools: a micropolitical discourse of management, culture and postmodern society, in M. Hayden, J. Levy and J. Thompson (Eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Research in International Education (2nd Edition)* pp. 433–446. London: SAGE Publications.

Caffyn, R. (2018) 'The Shadows Are Many...' Vampirism in 'International School' leadership: Problems and potential in cultural, political, and psycho-social borderlands, *Peabody Journal of Education* 93 (5), 500-517.

Civinini, C. (2019, August 28) Sustained growth for the 'International School' sector, thepienews.com

Cravens, X. (2018) School leadership in 'International Schools': Perspectives and practices, *Peabody Journal of Education* 93 (5), 584-588.

Ferguson, D. (2018, October 2) I will never return to England, *The Guardian*.

Frawley, A. (2018) 'Unhappy news': Process, rhetoric, and context in the making of the 'Happiness Problem', *Sociological Research Online* 23 (1), 43-66.

Gardner-McTaggart, A. (2018) 'International Schools': Leadership reviewed, *Journal of Research in International Education* 17 (2), 148-163.

Gaskell R. (2016) The global expansion of 'International Schools', *ECIS Global Insights* 2, 24-27.

Glass, J. (1971) Toward a 'sociology of being': The humanistic potential, *Sociological Analysis* 32 (4), 191-198.

Gu, Q., & Day, C. (2013) Challenges to teacher resilience: Conditions count, *British Educational Research Journal* 39 (1), 22-44.

Halicioglu, M. (2015) Challenges facing teachers new to working in schools overseas, *Journal of Research in International Education* 14 (3), 242-257.

Hawley, D (1994) How long do 'International School' heads survive? Part 1, *International Schools* Journal 14 (1), 8-21.

Hawley, D. (1995) How long do 'International School' heads survive? Part 2, *International Schools Journal* 14 (2), 23-36.

Heckert, D. (2007) Positive deviance, *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* 1-3.

Hayden, M., & Thompson, J. (2008) *International Schools: Growth and Influence*. UNESCO: Paris.

Hayden, M., & Thompson, J. (2013) International Schools: Antecedents, current issues and metaphors for the future, in: R. Pearce (Ed.) *International Education and Schools: Moving Beyond the First 40 Years* pp.3-24. Bloomsbury Academic: London.

Goodwin, G. (1983) Toward a paradigm for 'Humanistic Sociology', *Humanity & Society* 7 (3), 219-237.

Keller, D. (2015) Leadership of international schools: Understanding and managing dualities, *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 43 (6), 900-917.

Leach, R. (1969) *International Schools and Their Role in the Field of Education*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Lee, M., & Walker, A. (2018). School Leadership in International Schools: Perspectives and Practices, *Peabody Journal of Education* 93 (5), 465-467.

Lee, M., Hallinger, P., & Walker, A. (2012a) Leadership challenges in international schools in the Asia Pacific region: evidence from programme implementation of the International Baccalaureate, *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 15 (3), 289-310.

Lee, M., Hallinger, P., & Walker, A. (2012b) A distributed perspective on instructional leadership in International Baccalaureate (IB) schools, *Educational Administration Quarterly* 48 (4), 664-698.

Littleford, J. (1999) Leadership of schools and the longevity of school heads, *International Schools Journal* 19 (1), 23-35.

Loxton, L. (2016, March 12) Five pitfalls to watch out for when working in an International School, *Tes.com*

Machin, D. (2017) The great Asian 'International School' gold rush: An economic analysis, *Journal of Research in International Education* 16 (2), 131-146.

Mahfouz, J., Sausner, E., & Kornhaber, M. (2019) US 'International Schools' overseas and the Common Core, *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 22 (4), 406-420.

Maulding, W., Peters, G., Roberts, J., Leonard, E., & Sparkman, L. (2012) Emotional intelligence and resilience as predictors of leadership in school administrators, *Journal of Leadership Studies* 5 (4), 20-29.

Mayer, M. (1968) *Diploma: International Schools and University Entrance.* The Twentieth Century Fund: New York.

Odland, G., & Ruzicka, M. (2009) An investigation into teacher turnover in 'International Schools', *Journal of Research in International Education* 8 (1), 5-29.

Poole, A. (2019a) International education teachers' experiences as an educational precariat in China, *Journal of Research in International Education* 18 (1), 60-76.

Poole, A. (2019b) Internationalised School Teachers' experiences of precarity as part of the Global Middle Class in China: Towards 'Resilience Capital', *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*.

Resnik, J. (2012) Sociology of international education: An emerging field of research, *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 22 (4), 291-310.

Roberts, D. (2016, February 16) Five myths about teaching in International Schools, *The Guardian*.

Savva M. (2017) The personal struggles of 'national' educators working in 'international' schools: an intercultural perspective, *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 15 (5), 576-589.

Speck, D. (2019a, August 23) Revealed: The phenomenal growth of 'International Schools', *Tes.com*

Speck, D. (2019b, August 23) Wanted: An extra 400,000 English-speaking teachers*, Tes.com*

Stebbins, R. (2009a) *Personal Decisions in the Public Square: Beyond Problem into a Positive Sociology.* Routledge: New York.

Stebbins, R. (2009b) Serious leisure and work, *Sociology Compass* 3 (5), 764-774.

Stout, W. (2005) Conflict and its resolution in the governance and management of 'International Schools', *International Schools Journal* 25 (1), 15-21.

Tarc P. & Mishra Tarc A. (2015) Elite 'International Schools' in the Global South: Transnational space, class relationalities and the 'middling' international schoolteacher, *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 36 (1), 34-52.

Thin, N. (2014) Positive sociology and appreciative empathy: History and prospects, *Sociological Research Online* 19 (2), 1-14.

Yamato, Y. (2003) *Education in the Market Place: Hong Kong's International Schools and Their Modes of Operation (No. 1).* Comparative Education Research Centre, University of Hong Kong: Hong Kong.

Walker, G. (2002) The language of international education, in: M. Hayden, J. Thompson, and G. Walker (Eds.) *International Education in Practice: Dimensions for National and international Schools* pp.208-216. Kogan Page: London.

Wright Mills, C. (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.